Patriarchal structural violence and narrative space in the reader's process of identification with female characters in Italian crime fiction

Abstract:
This article focuses on the representation of some of the most unconventional female characters in Italian crime fiction with particular consideration to patriarchal structural violence and to the way in which readers engage empathically and cognitively with these characters during the reader's process of identification. The aim of this article is to reposition Italian crime fiction in the debate of patriarchal structural violence by exploring constructions and manipulations of masculinity and, particularly, femininity. It will be argued that, since the 1960s when Italian crime fiction succeeded in creating its own identity and respectability as a literary genre, crime fiction authors have engaged in structural violence by complying with the cultural debate about women's social role in the private and in the public sphere according to patriarchal models of thought. In this context, it will also be argued that a recent trend of Italian women crime fiction has been making an important contribution to the evolution of this literary genre by engaging with the critical interrogation of patriarchal structural violence against women from a decisively female perspective.

While the central concern of contemporary Italian women crime writers remains violence against women (Pieri and Rinaldi 123), it can be argued that this theme has also been running through Italian crime writers' novels since the post-war period. In particular, it emerged more prominently from the 1960s when writers such as Leonardo Sciascia offered narratives which are highly influenced by the social structure of the location where the novel is set, which shape the characters' actions and behaviour. In particular, this socio-geographical approach is an essential feature of Giorgio Scerbanenco's *Duca Lamberti* crime novels[1], which originate, to a large extent, from the traumatic consequences of the structural violence due to the economic miracle.[2] The term structural violence refers to any form of violence in which some social structure or social institution may harm people by preventing them from meeting their needs.[3] However, for the purpose of this analysis, we shall refer to the reduced quality of life in which women's potential is diminished. There is clear evidence to suggest that women have been subordinated, subjugated, and exploited since the beginning of the civilization and, from a feminist perspective, socio-cultural, economic, and political structural violence against women happens because of their gender and consequently a patriarchal structural violence takes place.[4] Although the ethics, the values, the morals, and the culture of Western society have been structured in such a way so as to promote socially constructed gender differences and legitimatise male domination, it is only recently that crime against women emerged more prominently in the Italian cultural sphere. The aim of this article thus is to reposition Italian crime fiction in the debate of patriarchal structural violence and explore constructions and manipulations of gender, masculinity and, particularly, femininity in Italian crime novels by analysing these texts not only as a means to recognise patriarchal structural violence as a symptom caused by repressed major contemporary socio-political and economic traumatic events – the economic miracle, globalization etc. – and their consequent transformations, but also as an arena to understand and articulate their psychological impact at a cultural level.

The analysis of this psychological component becomes crucial to fully understand the wider significance of art, which needs to be discussed in the context of a shifting attention from 'an author-centric towards a reader-centric paradigm […] from the production of art to its reception' (Burns 2009 35). As Antonello explains, Italian literary criticism has always been characterised by an emphasis on authorship, which does not explain how texts are read and understood, confirming that critical tradition has always been defined by its top-down view of aesthetic communication (Antonello and Mussgnug 10). Methodologically, this study will thus proceed to consider not just what is in the texts but also how a reader potentially responds to their content and, specifically, readers propensity to respond cognitively and emotionally to fictional characters, which is a key aspect of our reading experience and enjoyment.

This article will focus on the representation of some of the major and unorthodox female characters in Italian crime fiction with particular consideration to patriarchal structural violence and to the way in which readers engage empathically and cognitively with spatial information during their process of identification with these characters. It will be argued that, from the 1960s onwards, Italian crime fiction has engaged in structural violence by conforming primarily with the cultural debate about women's social role in the private and in the public sphere according to patriarchal models of thought. However, it will also be argued that a recent trend of Italian women crime fiction has been making an important contribution to the evolution of this literary genre by destabilising the traditional narrative style and character-making process conventions of the genre and engaging with the critical interrogation of patriarchal structural violence from a female perspective. For the purpose of this analysis, we shall focus on three Italian crime fiction series: Scerbanenco's *Duca Lamberti* series (1965-1969), Carlo Lucarelli's *Grazia Negro* series (1994-2013)[5] and Grazia Verasani's *Giorgia Cantini* series (2004-2015)[6]. The selection of these specific texts has been made taking into consideration their thematic relevance to the main subject of this analysis – patriarchal structural violence – and the relevance of certain unconventional female characters represented in these novels to the readers' process of identification with fictional characters.

Readers and audiences' engagement with narrative characters

Over the last two decades, models on reading and viewing experiences have been developed and bring together theories and methods from a wide range of disciplines including literary studies, film and media communication studies, linguistics, cognitive narratology, psychology and neuroscience. These models allow for an assessment of the impact of text features on storytelling practices and processing.[7] One of the most crucial aspects of a story is its capacity to engage its audience to the story world. Studying the audience's engagement with both written and audiovisual narratives, showed that this experience is multidimensional, consisting of focusing one's attention on the events and characters in the story world. In particular, characters can evoke strong emotions in their audience, which explains why identification with a narrative character plays an important role in the reading and audiovisual experience.

In this respect, many studies have suggested that identification with a character is evoked by the extent to which an audience member considers herself as similar to the character and considers the character likeable or sympathetic (Slater and

Rouner; Cohen; Brown; Raney). Indeed, a character's likeability is a significant character-based driver of identification: the audience is more inclined to identify with a character who holds, and acts upon the same norms and values upheld by the audience member. Furthermore, audiences are constantly evaluating the character's morality. When, morally, they approve of the character's actions, thoughts, desires and feelings, they are more likely to consider the character's goals as desirable and the actions needed for attaining these goals as justified.

In this cognitive framework of readers and audiences' identification to characters, Murray Smith's concepts of *alignment* and *allegiance* help explain how this process of identification with a fictional character tends to be complex, transitory and selective.[8] Smith observes that the narration of a text:

> may place the reader in an *alignment* with a certain character or characters by showing the reader a spatio-temporal path of a particular character throughout the narrative. This alignment also depends on how the narration may vary the degree to which the reader is given access to the subjectivity of characters – that is the characters' actions, desires, thoughts and feelings. (Smith 187)

In contrast, *allegiance*

> refers to the moral evaluation of characters by the reader. Allegiance depends on the reader having reliable access to the character's state of mind, or understanding the context of the character's actions, and having morally evaluated the character on the basis of this knowledge. Consequently, readers construct moral structures, in which characters are organized and ranked in a system of preference, readers often taking an interest in the welfare of a character whose value system most closely matches their own. (Smith 84)

These concepts – *spatio-temporal path*, *subjectivity*, *alignment* and *allegiance* – will help us to understand how readers can be placed in a certain *alignment* and thus reaching a certain degree of *allegiance* with a character, that is the reader's moral evaluation of the character by means of textual cues that give expression to the narrative character's viewpoint, actions, thoughts, desires and feelings. In particular, this analysis will demonstrate how spatial information given through the textual cues in the story world can affect readers' perception of the fictional characters' experience of narrative space and how this can create instances of both juncture and disjuncture between alignment and allegiance. It will be argued that these instances help explain the dominant position of certain male or female characters in the story world and their potential impact on the readers' process of identification.

A cognitive process of spatial information: the case of Scerbanenco's *Duca Lamberti* series

As readers progress through the narrative text, they gather spatial information into a cognitive map or mental model of narrative space which is constructed and stored in a long-term memory, which is built from a sequence of spatial frames that replace each other in the short-term memory. In other words, mental models of narrative space are both dynamically constructed in the course of reading and consulted by the reader to

orient herself in the narrative world and, specifically, in her engagement and identification process with fictional characters.[9] Spatial data are provided through the textual cues in the story world and, on the macro-level, spatial information can be given through two basic strategies: the map and the tour strategy. In the map strategy, space is represented panoramically from a certain static perspective and space is typically divided into segments. The tour strategy, by contrast, represents space dynamically from a mobile point of view simulating the embodied experience of a traveller, in this case of mobile fictional characters (Linde and Labov 929-930).
The tour strategy, for example, is mostly used in Scerbanenco's *Duca Lamberti* novels to represent the mobile narrative experience of many characters. However, there are exceptions and the use of either the map or/and the tour strategy distinctively is fundamental in the way readers take in spatial information regarding certain female characters and consequently respond emotionally and cognitively to them. Specifically, these narrative strategies will help illustrate how different typologies of female characters are represented either in the private or in the public sphere and how, as demonstrated by the dominant feminist critique, this private/public dichotomy implies a hierarchical, sexualised and gendered binary order and is decisive for the allocation of power and resources.[10] In Scerbanenco's work, this emerges prominently in the main protagonist's sister, Lorenza Lamberti, a twenty-two year old, who fell pregnant and was subsequently abandoned by her lover. She is a single mother and her relationship with Duca Lamberti denotes her inferiority within the *private* family and household context, which is in fact the only context in which Lorenza exists in the narrative world. This spatial element is described by Scerbanenco through the static map strategy which puts the emphasis on the fact that Lorenza is not a mobile character and consequently is not present in the *public* sphere at all and this emphasises also her restricted social role.

[Duca] fischiò e Lorenza si affacciò alla finestra del primo piano con la bambina in braccio […] Lorenza era sul pianerottolo con la bambina in braccio. (*Venere Privata* 46-47)

[Duca] non voleva immaginare Lorenza, sola nella casa sola. (*I ragazzi del massacro* 122)

In this context, and specifically in these examples, the concept of perspective is particularly relevant. Perspective refers to the source of knowledge and perception within the text which can influence readers' understanding and interpretations of fictional characters.[11] Indeed, it is important, in analysing the perspective, to indicate not only a point or position from which the events are viewed, but also the kind of mind located at this position and the kind of privilege this mind enjoys.[12] In our analysis of the reader's process of identification with the female character in the abovementioned excerpts, the choice of a specific grammatical subject – active or passive form – can affect readers' spatial perception in the sense that they view the described scene through the eyes of the character in an active or passive subject position of the clause. It is of crucial importance then to understand and interpret the agent and mode of perspective: the access to Lorenza's spatial representation and position is given from the perspective or even through the internal monologue of the male protagonist, Duca Lamberti. In other words, by limiting Lorenza's actions to those typical domestic locations and by describing her spatial position from the male protagonist's point of view, the author represses any possibility for Lorenza to acquire any power, independence or agency in the public sphere.

Cognitively, Lorenza is not a character into whose thought, point of view or action processes the reader is given consistent insight. Consequently, because of this very limited access to Lorenza's subjectivity and, particularly, because of her total static spatial experience in the story world, the reader is prompted to make little, if no *alignment* with her. Furthermore, Lorenza's submissive attitude and restricted social role does not allow her personality and objectives to emerge to the point that the reader cannot engage in any moral evaluation of the character and therefore no *allegiance* with her will be possible. Perhaps, since readers are hardly able to engage cognitively with the mental process of the character, the only moral evaluation they can carry out might result in a feeling of pity for Lorenza's adverse social condition as described through the male protagonist's vantage point: she is in fact a single mother, or according to the terminology of that period, a *donna perduta* (a fallen woman), a woman who compromised her reputation because she was involved in voluntary sexual relations outside marriage. Indeed, such social categories have been deconstructed by feminist critics who have demonstrated that the structural subordination of women to men is essentially based on sexual objectification, which creates and defines women's social role. In other words, the conditions of women's knowledge and experience were, and to a large extent still is, the product of patriarchy.[13] Therefore, with its one-dimensional representation of Lorenza, these texts clearly draw on the structural violence resulting from the private/public-female/masculine hierarchized divide to reinforce patriarchal gender norms.

However, these novels also offer a very unorthodox female character: Livia Ussaro, Duca Lamberti's partner, who is a perceptive figure, profoundly aware of the socio-economic mechanisms and values emerging in Italy during the post-economic miracle period. Her role in the *Lamberti* series goes much further than representing an example of female victimization in a restricted space as she embodies the characteristics of a dynamic and spatially mobile woman. In *Venere Privata*, Livia collaborates in the investigations of the case by working as an occasional prostitute on the streets of Milan and provides important information regarding the world of female prostitution and its spatial representation and meaning:

Senza saperlo mi ero fermata un momento in via Visconti di Modrone, era pomeriggio, non sapevo che era "zona assegnata", almeno la sera, stavo attenta a non andare mai dove erano le professioniste, quella volta sbagliai. D'improvviso scese uno da una motoretta [...] voleva costringermi ad entrare nella sua "scuderia", ma passava un po' di gente e riuscii a liberarmene. (*Venere Privata* 156)

Ecco Livia Ussaro al lavoro, nel tratto ultimo di Via Giuseppe Verdi, quasi in piazza della Scala, ore dieci e trenta appena passate […] Iniziò la passeggiata: via Manzoni, via Palestro, corso Venezia, corso Buenos Aires, piazzale Loreto. […] Alle tre e mezzo Livia Ussaro si trovava nella seconda zona: piazza San Babila, fino a piazza San Carlo, fare il giro di tutte le gallerie […] Era l'ora del cinema, del teatro, bastava tenersi lontani da corso Vittorio, area di servizio delle professioniste, e dedicarsi un po' più a corso Matteotti, per avere buone probabilità di fare qualche incontro. (*Venere Privata* 160-164)

It is interesting to note that, in these examples, the access to Livia's spatial position and representation is partially given from her vantage point of narration with a

grammatical active subject position of the clause, at least in the first passage mentioned above – mi ero fermata, non sapevo, stavo attenta, mi sbagliai. In addition, in two novels of the series (*I ragazzi del massacro* and *I milanesi ammazzano al sabato*) Livia acts as an unofficial police driver during the investigations which makes her even a more mobile character in the public sphere and also allows her to participate actively to the investigations.[14]

In this context, motion verbs are instrumental for the construction and updating of spatial representation and perception in the story world. However, motion verbs are particularly important because they not only encode the directionality of movement and paths taken by characters as they move from place to place, but also express the quality of characters' mobility and their narrative experience of space. These elements can play an important role in guiding the way in which readers cognitively and emotionally perceive fictional characters. A relevant example is the author's use of the verb *guidare* as referred to Livia. Although Duca Lamberti gives her directions, in several passages Scerbanenco emphasises how good a driver Livia is: "Lei [Livia] mise in moto dolcemente, guidava molto bene" (*I ragazzi del massacro* 87); "Livia guidava bene nonostante la nebbia e il traffico" (*I ragazzi del massacro* 141); "Livia guida cauta" (*I ragazzi del massacro* 156). The automobile is clearly a symbol of men's economic power which reinforces their dominant and mobile social position in the *public* and extra-domestic space. This was particularly true in the post-economic miracle period when cars became an essential element to define the social status and role of an individual. By associating Livia with this specific motion verb – guidare – and by portraying her as a good driver and in more general terms by using the tour strategy to represent Livia's mobile narrative experience often from the vantage point of her narration, readers perceive Livia as a modern and original female character, who crosses the boundary between these symbolically charged spaces and appears to have both a private and public social role. However, although Livia represents an alternative and original depiction of the social position of women, the representation of her relationship with Duca Lamberti fundamentally leaves her in a secondary role, her level of narrative involvement being limited by the male protagonist's dominant position in the story world. For example, Livia experiences the public sphere because Duca Lamberti requires her involvement in the investigations by working as a prostitute on the streets of Milan, which, in itself reflects unambiguously the structural violence of patriarchy with particular reference to the commodification of Livia's body for male pleasure. Furthermore, although Scerbanenco describes her as a good driver, she drives following Duca Lamberti's *orders*. In other words, Livia's mobility and spatial experience is actually dependent on the male character and eventually she plays the conventional subordinate role in her relationship with him. We can argue then that the reader is given sustained access to Livia's actions and feelings, and constantly follows her narrative spatio-temporal paths as a result of the fact that she has a highly mobile narrative experience in the public sphere. Therefore, a high degree of *alignment* with her is likely to develop. However, the reader's cognitive and emphatic identification with Livia arguably never develops into full *allegiance* with her because her level of narrative involvement and spatial experience is in fact defined by Duca Lamberti's dominant position in the story world. Therefore, despite the fact that readers may perceive Livia's intelligence and spatial mobility as traits that make her fully aware of the nature and implications of her societal position, her role serves essentially to reinforce the inferior position of women in post-war Italian society. In other words,

the text reinforces the public form of patriarchy in which social structures enable men to control women's role in public sites such as employment.[15]

This symbolic organization of space in which female characters exist allows Scerbanenco to provide a narrative world structured by oppositions between private and public realms, which reinforce existing gender identities and social roles by working to contain the perceived threat of female independence. In other words, these texts serve up a comforting vision for the reader that reinforces the patriarchal norms as one of the central elements of post-war Italian crime fiction. The *Lamberti* series can thus be read as a reflection of the gendered structural violence inflicted by Italy's experience of the economic miracle. Theoretically, the economic miracle offered vulnerable social groups, such as women, the possibility to ascend the social ladder. However, the strategy of containment in the author's use of spatial information and their its impact on the reader's engagement and identification process with fictional characters seem to reflect the symptomatic psychic reaction of the dominant class, which aims to repress, contain and dominate the threatening consequences of the economic miracle; that is, the possibility for women to gain socio-economical and political power, which would have allowed them to organise and develop a well-structured and effective feminist movement, and rapidly attain a certain degree of emancipation. In the context of this analysis, Scerbanenco's narrative strategy of containment arguably reflects the attempt of Italian patriarchal culture to contain and repress any *threatening* female fictional character by, for example, limiting her actions to the domestic sphere or describing scenes through the eyes of the active male character, which deny any possibility to provide a clear and widespread feminine spatial experience and perception. Therefore, in Scerbanenco's *Lamberti* crime novels, the prominent link between female characters and a restricted and often passive level of narrative involvement and spatial experience defined by the male character's dominant position in the story world represents an example of patriarchal structural violence in the post-war cultural sphere and complies with the typical debate about women's social role in the private and in the public sphere according to patriarchal models of thought.

The spatial overpowering position of male characters in Carlo Lucarelli's *Grazia Negro* series

In the context of this analysis, another relevant example is Carlo Lucarelli's *Ispettore Grazia Negro* series. In these crime novels, Lucarelli opted for a female detective, Grazia Negro, who is a tough-minded, resolute and intrepid woman; her instinct and her effective line of reasoning are important elements in the resolution of the cases she investigates. However, she would not be able to resolve these cases without the crucial contribution made by certain male characters.[16] Furthermore, male characters' perspective sometimes seems to occupy a spatial overpowering position, which regularly results in the female protagonist's feeling of discomfort, unease and disquiet. In *Almost Blue*, for example, Grazia is introduced to the reader for the first time in the passage where the author describes her feeling of physical pain and discomfort due to her menstrual cycle.[17] With respect to the link between spatial information and Grazia's interaction with other male characters and its impact on the process of readers' identification with characters, an essential element is that large parts of the events are rendered through the visual, auditory, and tactile perceptions of characters. Readers then visualise a character's perceptual perspective by drawing

inferences about the relation between the perceiver and what is being perceived, and this relation can be linguistically expressed in an explicit way by the use of verbs of bodily sensation or verbs of perception. A good example of this is the following excerpt in which Grazia Negro and Commissario Vittorio Poletto meet with deputy public prosecutor Alvau and the police commissioner to discuss the cases under investigation:

Grazia se li sentiva tutti addosso. Il questore, quasi appoggiato su una spalla, che le alitava su un orecchio e prima, con la risata, le aveva sparato un grumo di saliva, duro e caldo, sulla punta di uno zigomo. Il sostituto procuratore dietro, chino su di lei come un avvoltoio, il mento che le sfiorava la testa e il palmo di Vittorio che le riscaldava la spalla sotto la stoffa del giubbotto, le punte delle dita che premevano sull'osso della clavicola (*Almost Blue* 24).

In this passage, the restricted space in which Grazia acts and the author's use of verbs of bodily sensation and of perception – sentiva, appoggiato, sfiorava, riscaldava, premevano etc. – emphasises to what extent male characters occupy a spatial overpowering position and how these characters are perceived as a threat by the female protagonist.[18] Although male characters put Grazia under pressure, she moves comfortably in the digital space. Indeed, in the abovementioned passage, she explains the cases under investigation by using the computer flawlessly (*Almost Blue* 19-20). However, Grazia's mastering of the digital space is disrupted by her feeling of discomfort due to her menstrual cycle and Vittorio, her closest collaborator in the investigation, does not miss the opportunity to let his male comrades know about it:

Grazia aveva avuto uno scatto che le aveva fatto sfiorare il mento del sostituto procuratore. Una fitta improvvisa dentro la pancia, un dolore rapido, umido e opaco, come una mano che le avesse stretto i visceri tra le dita. La piega tra gli occhi si era approfondita in una smorfia riflessa per un momento sullo schermo del terminale. 'Non si sente bene, signorina?', chiese il questore, mentre Grazia diceva 'No, no' scuotendo la testa. […] 'L'ispettore Negro sarebbe, diciamo cosi, un po' indisposta' [disse Vittorio]. Alvau e il questore fecero 'Ah'. A Grazia si infiammarono le guance. (*Almost Blue* 27-28)

Again, amongst other linguistic cues – nouns such as fitta, dolore, visceri, piega, smorfia etc. and adjectives including rapido, umido and opaco –, verbs of bodily sensation and of perception – avesse stretto, si infiammarono – are employed to render the physical and emotional significance of the protagonist's perception of the abovementioned event. Therefore, in several occasions, Lucarelli's portrayal of Grazia Negro seems to support the positivist-scientific ideology, which conforms to the representation of female characters based on women's biological characteristics.[19] An additional example of this is one of the opening passages of *Il sogno di volare* and the author's decision to place Grazia in a typical spatial experience where her feeling of discomfort is engendered by another scientific-physical-psychological factor:

> […] stesa sulla schiena, le gambe aperte e le caviglie appoggiate alle mezzelune imbottite che si alzavano in fondo al lettino. Era una posizione che l'aveva sempre messa a disagio, lasciandola ad aprire e chiudere nervosamente le dita dei piedi finché il ginecologo, uomo o donna che fosse, non le aveva detto che poteva rivestirsi. (*Il sogno di volare* 16-17)

Lucarelli's recurrent emphasis on the importance of representing female-spatial experiences in line with the protagonist's biological traits remains open to interpretations. On the one hand, it may reflect the attempt to provide female readers with a character who is similar to them, and who has similar problems and similar experiences to those they face in their daily life. Indeed, similarity and homophily may play an important role in explaining the reader's identification process with characters (Cohen 187-188). On the other hand, Lucarelli puts the emphasis on a disruptive and unsettling spatial experience of the female figure, whose biological nature condemns her to a feeling of physical pain and psychological discomfort and embarrassment which is often defined in the story world by male characters. Indeed, to counter this kind of biological determinism and the view that biology is destiny, Simone de Beauvoir has argued that 'one is not born, but rather becomes a woman' (18) and feminists have endorsed the sex/gender distinction where *sex* denotes human females and males depending on *biological* features – chromosomes, sex organs, hormones and other physical features – and *gender* denotes women and men depending on *social* factors – social role, position, behaviour or identity.[20] Indeed, these texts reinforce the notion of women as constrained by their biology – and men as not, for example, with the characterisation of Simone, a young blind man; in *Almost Blue* Simone's blindness is portrayed by the author as a positive trait which has an impact on the reader's identification process with the novels' characters as we shall discuss later. However, it could also be argued that although these texts conform to the idea that Grazia Negro is constrained by her biology – she feels shame; she is trapped by her body; she feels discomfort – her biological nature is, to a certain extent, contained by the character's positive psychological and behavioural traits – she is tough-minded, resolute and effective.

Cognitively, the author's use of verbs of bodily sensation, verbs of perception or other linguistic cues gives readers full access to Grazia's actions, feelings, desires and emotions from her vantage point of view. Therefore, readers align with Grazia's perceptual perspective and draw inferences about the relation between the perceiver and that what is being perceived. This allows readers to develop a high degree of *alignment* with the female protagonist. Furthermore, from a moral point of view, Grazia is narratively an essential element in the investigation and the resolution of the cases, and this encourages the reader to reach a high level of *allegiance* with her.

However, in *Almost Blue*, the significance and relevance of spatial representations and their impact on the reader's process of identification with the female protagonist also emerges in Grazia's spatial interaction with two prominent male characters in the novel, respectively Vittorio and Simone. From a purely mobility perspective, Vittorio emerges as a more dynamic and mobile character than Grazia. Lucarelli's use of the map strategy seemingly makes Grazia Negro a mobile character with a clear presence in the public sphere. However, her actions are mainly restricted to the Bologna area with which she does not seem to have a harmonious and intimate relationship (*Almost Blue* 31, 99). In particular, textual spatial information emphasise her difficult rapport with the university space and environment of the city (*Almost Blue* 103-104). By contrast, Vittorio constantly travels to distant national and international locations – Rome and the United States. It can be argued thus that Vittorio seems to play an active role in the process of globalization that characterises contemporary society. On the contrary, Grazia passively endures the impact of

globalization on Bologna, a postmodern metropolis with which she can hardly relate and identify precisely because of the main consequences of globalisation.[21]

Grazia's interaction with Simone is also relevant. From the beginning of the novel, Simone's narrative vantage point of narration is evident and events are described through his auditory and tactile perceptions. Initially, their relationship is not particularly friendly mainly because Grazia is not aware of Simone's blind spatial perception and consequently she gets clumsy and uncomfortable (*Almost Blue* 90-93). However, it is Simone's subjective perception and interpretation of space, people and objects that allow Grazia to cast off her constant feeling of discomfort and embarrassment and, to a large extent, to fall in love with him. In particular, Simone's blindness establishes a relationship with Grazia which does not seem to leave space to any form of structural violence of patriarchy, as the following passage explicitly shows:

Grazia sorrise e di nuovo guardò Simone, la sua espressione asimmetrica, l'occhio socchiuso che non la vedeva, non la spiava, sembrava non chiederle nulla e non chiedersi niente di lei. Quando era entrata nella mansarda e si era seduta sul divano, per un momento si era sentita sollevata, quasi tranquilla […] pensò che forse era per lui. Perché poteva stare in un posto con qualcuno senza che questo la fissasse, *ironico o paterno*, ma sempre per chiederle qualcosa, *e vestiti da donna, e resta con me a lavorare al bar, e prendilo bambina*. Con Simone no. Lui non guardava, lui non fissava, lui non chiedeva niente. (*Almost Blue* 121-122; emphasis mine)[22]

Indeed physical and psychological disabilities are crucial elements in the process of characterization, and the description of how blindness can affect the perception of the story world of an individual character plays a fundamental role in creating the fusion of cognitive representation and empathy that mark the reader's involvement and engagement with characters. Blindness is surely the main element of characterization in making Simone the prominent male character of the story and Lucarelli provides humanizing representations of the character's disability, which are connected with the character's isolation, vulnerability and sensitivity.[23] Therefore, readers will arguably be prompted to engage emotionally with Simone, not only as a result of his disability, but also because of the character's essential contribution to the resolution of the case in the final stage of the novel. This provides the reader with full access to the character's actions, feelings, desires and emotions thus creating a high degree of *alignment*. By giving readers full access to Simone's narrative path and subjectivity, and by establishing the physical attributes and the mental state of Simone as a prominent and dominant element in the description of spatial elements, Lucarelli provides the viewer with another potential point of identification, reducing to some extent the degree of cognitive identification with the spatial perception and aims of Grazia Negro. In narrative terms, especially in the first part of the novel, readers are closely aligned with Grazia's thought processes and actions and this arguably develops into a high degree of *allegiance* to the character, because of her high moral engagement to the resolution of the cases she investigates, which is the crucial aim that the protagonist shares with the readers. However, in the second part of the novel, the reader's alignment also lies to a large extent with Simone, a figure whose sensitivity and isolation elicit stronger attachments, particularly if we take into consideration that the readers are given full access to the blind character's thought processes and spatial experience. It can be argued then that, at least in the second part of the novel, the reader's cognitive and emotional attention arguably shifts from the

female protagonist to the *male* character, thus emphasizing that, as the plot unfolds, the male figure becomes, in fact, the prominent character of the story.

We can argue then that, similarly to Scerbanenco's *Lamberti* novels, Lucarelli's *Grazia Negro* series can also be read as a reflection of the patriarchal structural violence; the author's use of spatial information and their impact in the reader's engagement and identification process with fictional characters seems to reflect the symptomatic psychic reaction of the dominant class, which aims to repress, contain and dominate the threatening consequences of the traumatic event; that is, the possibility for dynamic and energetic women to play a prominent role in the postmodern globalised context and gain socio-economical, political power. Grazia Negro plays an active role in the public sphere, however, when compared to other male characters, she undoubtedly plays a passive role in the process of globalisation and her prominent vantage point of view is, at least in the second part of *Almost Blue*, replaced by the male character's cognitive and emphatic processes, which deny any development of a conspicuous feminine spatial experience and perception. Therefore, the prominent link of the main female character with her biological characteristics, and a restricted, and at times passive level of narrative involvement and spatial experience defined by male characters' dominant position seem to be, on the overall, in line with a patriarchal model of thought, an aspect that, to a large extent, Lucarelli's crime novels share with Scerbanenco's work.

The female character's outer and inner spatial and psychological experience in Grazia Verasani's *Giorgia Cantini* series

However, in a world dominated by male writers, it is interesting to note that, as Pieri and Rinaldi claim, 'Italian women crime writers have been showing the signs of a profound engagement with the most pressing issues which Italy is facing in the new millennium' (124). This engagement is particularly interesting because it points to the importance of patriarchal structural violence as one of the main elements in contemporary crime fiction. In the case of such a highly codified genre such as crime fiction, it is essential thus to look at how the works of women crime writers bring in changes and new perspectives to the creation of female characters and their experience of the narrative space, with particular consideration to their impact on the readers' process of identification. Due to the comparative nature of this study, we shall focus on Grazia Verasani's *Giorgia Cantini* series which is particularly relevant because, in this series, the author re-works the conventions of the crime novel through a resolutely female perspective. To a large extent, in these novels, elements of the hard-boiled tradition feature prominently especially in the characterisation of the female detective who reflects 'the female version of the private investigator of the hard-boiled school' (Pieri and Rinaldi 121).[24] This arguably allows Verasani to appropriate a typically male-orientated stereotype and re-work it so that it can function 'as a strategic means to re-think the genre itself and the socio-political dynamics depicted in it' (Risi 119).

Furthermore, as Risi explains, it is 'the act of shifting the female protagonist's gaze from the outside of the narrated story to the inner spaces of her subjectivity that most often characterizes crime fiction written by women […]. The stories become private accounts which can be read, ultimately, as a reflection on women's public condition and social status in our times' (124). This is particularly true in Verasani's *Cantini* series, which focuses on the protagonist's external and introspective space mobility

by fully describing the character's actions, feelings, fears and contradictions from a clear and unambiguous female angle. In other words, the discussion about the fictional character's spatial mobility and perspective shifts from the tangible space – private and/or public realms – to the psychological dimension of the female character which, in the *Cantini* series, seems to play a crucial role in the spatial representation of the embodied experience not only of the main character but also of other characters. Indeed, Verasani's protagonist enjoys a clear and full spatial mobility in the private and public sphere, which is consistently represented from her vantage point of narration, from a grammatical active subject position of the clause – first person narrator – and through the use of verbs of bodily sensation, perception and mobility associated with the main protagonist. Many are the examples of this including the following excerpts taken from the opening paragraph of *Velocemente da nessuna parte*:

Afferro il bagaglio dal tapis roulant con la stanchezza di un viaggiatore pentito, poi, palpando una tasca del giubbotto di jeans, avverto il peso piuma di due o tre cartoline che mi sono dimenticata di spedire. Cammino in questo spazio asettico – un misto di plastica e acciaio – affollato di turisti e di personale. (9)

Avevi le lenzuola attorcigliate alle gambe e hai fatto qualcosa che somigliava a un sorriso. Sono tornata verso di te, già mezza vestita […]; credevi che ti centrassi la bocca con un bacio e invece ho mirato alla fronte; era il mio modo di azionare la freccia e imboccare la classica scorciatoia. (10)

Furthermore, and perhaps crucially, Verasani provides the reader with a full access to the cognitive and psychological dimension of the female protagonist, which emphasises the importance of representing spatial experiences in line with the female protagonist's mindset, which refers not only to the character's thoughts, feelings, desires and emotions but also to her expectations, aims and intentions as shown in the latter of the abovementioned examples. Furthermore, the protagonist's psychological viewpoint is represented by reporting, through various means of verbalization, her thoughts – direct thoughts, indirect thoughts, and free indirect thoughts. This is linguistically encoded by verbs of cognition – chiedersi, pensare, avere un'opinione, sopravvalutare etc. Take the following examples from *Velocemente da nessuna parte*:

Due uomini sulla cinquantina dai capelli brizzolati e le facce abbronzate bevono Bellini fissando l'ombelico delle ragazze sedute in modo sparso agli altri tavoli […]. Ascolto le battute salaci che si scambiano e mi chiedo se nelle tasche delle loro giacche tengano boccette di Viagra, accanto alle caramelle per l'alito. (12)

All'inizio, l'agenzia investigativa Cantini operava anche per conto di avvocati e di piccoli imprenditori, ma adesso ci occupiamo per lo più di casi di infedeltà […]. Mio padre di adulteri, non ne vuole sapere, li passa a me perché dice che in queste cose lui è un sentimentale. Evidentemente, ha un'opinione poco romantica di me. Secondo Cantini, io ho il sangue freddo necessario per spezzare il cuore a gente che vuole sapere di che morte muore […]. Mio padre mi sopravvaluta. (16)

Cognitively, these examples show that readers internalise the story world persistently not only through Giorgia Cantini's spatio-temporal perspective but also by sharing her psychological dimension and subjective cognitive ability to draw inferences about her

and other characters' actions, thoughts and intentions. It is also interesting to note that in the abovementioned examples the male characters' spatial experience and psychological dimension – the two men's and her father's actions, thoughts and intentions – are described from the vantage point of narration and the grammatical and psychological active subject position of the main female character. This highly enhances readers' cognitive identification with Giorgia Cantini and allows them to develop a full degree of *alignment* with her. By contrast, this reduces any possibility for the reader to identify with the *passive* subjectivity of the male characters.
Morally, Cantini emerges as a contradictory and vulnerable character – some of the typical characteristics of the protagonist of the hard-boiled tradition, which can also be found in Scerbanenco's Duca Lamberti. However, her authenticity and moral values arguably encourage the reader to reach a very high level of *allegiance* with her. In particular, the character's authenticity and moral values are reflected in her resolution to solve and her deep reflections on the cases she investigates, and in *Quo vadis, Baby?*, in her determined attempt to understand and explain why, on different occasions, his mother and his sister committed suicide.[25] It can be argued thus that Verasani's narrative strategy reflects the attempt of Italian women crime writers to develop and empower female fictional characters by expanding their action from the tangible space to the psychological dimension by describing actions, thoughts, feelings and emotions through the point of view of the female character. This provides readers with a widespread feminine outer and inner spatial and psychological experience, in terms of both perception and interpretation of the storyworld. As a consequence of this, readers are given a real possibility to reach, potentially, full *alignment* and *allegiance* with characters such as Giorgia Cantini.

We can conclude thus that Verasani follows to a large extent the rules of the genre and conform to some of its stereotypes – the prominence of elements of the hard-boiled tradition and the influence of the urban space and popular culture in the changing perception of Italian society – in the context of a potential feminist appropriation of the genre. The author also follows the tendency of the genre to renew its social and political commitment by emphasising and exposing the highly tragic consequences of patriarchal structural violence on Italian women and, more specifically, with reference to domestic violence. However, Verasani also clearly subverts some of the conventions of the Italian crime novel by offering a full and active level of narrative involvement and spatial experience defined by the female character's outer and inner dominant position in the story world with a renewed debate about women's social role. In other words, Verasani and other Italian women crime writers[26] have been making a fundamental contribution to the evolution of the genre by destabilising the traditional narrative style and character-making process conventions of the genre and engaging with the critical interrogation of patriarchal structural violence against women from a female perspective. This means that Italian female crime fiction exposes and plays the theme out in the cultural arena and secures a strong hold in the collective memory and imagination together with other texts, and audiovisual and media artefacts such as for example Serena Dandini's book and theatrical work *Ferite a morte*, and Rai3 TV programme *Amore Criminale*.[27]

Indeed, violence against women is a topical issue and Italian society and its patriarchal structure has been a major hub of structural violence, politically, economically and culturally. In Italy, crime and violence against women are increasingly recognised not only as an individual or a collective issue, but also as a result of a cultural crisis and, as this analysis has demonstrated, Italian crime texts

play an important role in the debate of patriarchal structural violence and constructions and manipulations of gender and, particularly, femininity. In particular, this analysis has demonstrated how spatial information given through the textual cues in the story world can affect readers' perception of the fictional characters' experience of narrative space. Building on the reader's engagement model, this study has explored how and why these crime fiction texts draw on patriarchal structural violence by using different approaches. On the one hand, both Scerbanenco and Lucarelli seem to employ a narrative strategy of containment which arguably reflects the attempt of Italian patriarchal culture to contain and repress any unorthodox female fictional character – such as Livia Ussaro and Grazia Negro – as a symptom caused by repressed major contemporary socio-political and economic traumatic events – the economic miracle, globalisation etc. – and their consequent transformations. On the other hand, crime novels narrated constantly and faithfully from the perspective of emancipated, strong and independent women such as Giorgia Cantini, expose and put into question the values of powerful patriarchal forces operating within the institution of family, state, and civil society. Crucially, this study has demonstrated that the analysis of these texts should focus not only on Italian crime novels as a corpus in which elements of patriarchal structural violence can be detected, but also as an arena to understand and articulate their psychological impact at a cultural level.

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Notes

[1] Giorgio Scerbanenco's *Duca Lamberti* series comprises *Venere privata* (1966), *Traditori di tutti* (1966), *I ragazzi del massacro* (1968) and *I milanesi ammazzano al sabato* (1969).

[2] For an analysis and an extensive bibliography on Scerbanenco's *Duca Lamberti* crime novels see Marco Paoli, *Giorgio Scerbanenco: Urban Space, Violence and Gender Identity in Italian Post-war Crime Fiction*. Brussels: Peter Lang, 2016.

[3] The term was coined by Johan Galtung, see Johan Galtung. "Violence, peace and peace research.' *Journal of Peace Research* 6.3 (1969): 167–191. From an extensive analysis of the concept of structural violence see in particular Paul Farmer. "An antrophology of Structural Violence." *Current Anthropology* 45.3 (June 2004): 305–325.

[4] For an overview on structural violence from a feminist perspective see Mary K. Anglin. "Feminist perspectives on structural violence." *Global Studies in Culture and Power* 5.2 (1998): 145–151.

[5] Carlo Lucarelli's *Ispettore Grazia Negro* series comprises *Lupo Mannaro* (1994), *Almost Blue* (1997), *Un giorno dopo l'altro* (2000), *Acqua in bocca* (2010) and *Il sogno di volare* (2013).

[6] The *Giorgia Cantini* series includes five novels: *Quo Vadis, Baby?* (2004), *Velocemente da nessuna parte* (2006), *Di tutti e di nessuno* (2009), *Cosa sai della notte* (2012) and *Senza ragione apparente* (2015).

[7] These models are far too many to be mentioned here. For an exhaustive literature review on this aspect from an interdisciplinary perspective and with a particular consideration to the reader's identification process with fictional characters refer to Kobie van Krieken, Hans Hoeken and José Sanders. "Evoking and Measuring Identification with Narrative Characters – A Linguistic Cues Framework." *Frontier in Psychology* 8:1190 (2017). https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5507957/ last accessed, 10 October 2018.

[8] For the purpose of this study, although Smith's theoretical approach focuses mainly on film analysis, it has proved useful in the examination of the literary texts: while the techniques used by a writer are different from those used by a film director, the consequent theoretical hypotheses apply to both forms of art. Consequently, when passages taken from Murray Smith's *Engaging Characters* are quoted, the term 'spectator' is replaced by 'reader'.

[9] For a detailed analysis of the reader's construction of cognitive map or mental model of narrative space see Marie-Laure Ryan. "Cognitive Maps and the Construction of Narrative Space." *Narrative Theory and the Cognitive Sciences*. Ed. David Herman. Stanford: CLSI, 2003: 214–242.

[10] For an overview of the critical approach to public/private distinction in feminist writing see in particular

Carole Pateman. "Feminist Critiques of the Public/Private Dichotomy." *Public and Private in Social Life*. Editors Stanley I. Benn and Gerald F. Gaus. London: Croom Helm, 1983: 281-303 and Ruth Gavison. "Feminism and the Public/Private Distinction." *Stanford Law Review* 45.1 (November 1992): 1–45.

[11] On perspective see Monica Fludernik. *Towards a 'Natural' Narratology*. London: Routledge, 1996 (in particular 133–162).

[12] On this aspect see in particular Wayne C. Booth. *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961: 160–163.

[13] On this see in particular Catharine A. MacKinnon. "Feminism, Marxism, and the State: Toward Feminist Jurisprudence" *Signs* 8.4 (Summer 1983): 635–658.

[14] For a discussion on the role of Livia Ussaro as an unofficial auxiliary police officer (*ausiliaria di polizia*) see Paoli 173–175.

[15] For an analysis of the patriarchal ideology and its forms in the private and public spheres see Sylvia Walby. *Theorizing Patriarchy*. Oxford, UK and Cambridge USA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1990.

[16] See for example the contribution made by Commissario Romeo in *Lupo Mannaro*; by Commissario capo Vittorio Poletto and Simone, a blind men, in *Almost Blue*; by Alex, a student who works part-time for a Web hosting service, in *Un giorno dopo l'altro*; by Commissario Montalbano in *Acqua in bocca* – co-written with Andrea Camilleri – and by the Comandante dei Carabinieri Pierluigi in *Il sogno di volare*.

[17] Grazia Negro's feeling of discomfort and unease is recurrent in these novels: see in particular *Almost Blue* 22, 27 and *Un giorno dopo l'altro* 39, 107.

[18] Indeed, Grazia Negro gets often embarrassed and uncomfortable during her interaction with male characters; see for example, in *Almost Blue*, the awkwardness emerging in her dialogues with the Brigadiere (42), with the Appuntato (44) and with his colleagues Sarrina and Matera (53–56).

[19] A similar example can be found in Scerbanenco's *I ragazzi del massacro* and specifically in the characterization of Marisella Domenici, which is essential based on biological determinism. On this aspect see Paoli 180–183 and Jennifer Burns. "Founding Fathers: Giorgio Scerbanenco." ED. Giuliana Pieri. *Italian Crime Fiction*. Cardiff: Wales University Press, 2011: 27–47 (39).

[20] On this aspect see Mari Mikkola. "Feminist Perspectives on Sex and Gender." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2017 Edition). Ed. Edward N. Zalta. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2017/entries/feminism-gender/ last accessed, 18 July 2018.

[21] In this respect, see Lucia Rinaldi. "Bologna's Noir Identity: Narrating the City in Carlo Lucarelli's Crime Fiction." *Italian Studies* 64.1 (Spring 2009): 120–133. The impact of the paradox of globalisation and structural violence on gender identities and social roles as one of the central themes of contemporary Italian crime fiction deserves a deeper analysis. Specifically, feminist analyses of globalisation have been addressing specific global women's issues as independent phenomena by taking into account the systematic and structural gendered violence associated with neoliberalism including multiple kinds of violence inflicted by the interaction of patriarchy with structural factors such as culture and economic opportunity. For an analysis of globalization and structural violence see Jessika Srikantia. "The structural violence of globalization." *Critical perspectives on international business* 12.3 (2016): 222–258; Jonathan Friedman, ed. *Globalization, the state, and violence*. Walnut Creek, California: AltaMira Press, 2003 and Serena Parekh and Shelley Wilcox. "Feminist Perspectives on Globalization." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2018 Edition). Ed. Edward N. Zalta. https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2018/entries/feminism-globalization/ last accessed, 19 July 2018.

[22] Interestingly, this is the main conceit of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, widely seen as a proto-feminist novel – it's only when Rochester is maimed and becomes blind that Jane can get together with him *as an equal*; Rochester is no longer superior to her and she's no longer having to subsume her identity into his. It can be argued that Lucarelli may have been aware of this literary precedent.

[23] There are several examples emphasizing Simone's disability that make the character's perception of space a central element in the narrative and that also reveal his vulnerability, sensitivity and feelings of isolation. See in particular *Almost Blue* 90–93, 122, 125, 173.

[24] In this respect, see in particular the description of the main female protagonist in the introductory pages to *Quo Vadis, Baby?* (9–11).

[25] Indeed, family is the main common thematic denominator in the work of contemporary Italian women crime writers. As Pieri and Rinaldi claim, female crime writers 'criticize and expose the contradictions and the dark side of this core social institution in Italy […]. The family becomes a metaphor for patriarchal society at large and violence towards women exposes the inner power dynamics at the core of contemporary Italian society'. (124)

[26] Just to mention a few, on this topic see also novels penned by the following contemporary Italian crime women writers: Dacia Maraini, Claudia Salvatori, Fiorella Cagnoni, Danila Comastri Montanari, Barbara Garlaschelli, Alda Teodorani, Elena Stancanelli and Nicoletta Vallorani.

[27] 'Serena Dandini, well-known personality on Italian television, writer and journalist has drawn on news stories to give a voice to women who have lost their lives at the hands of a husband, a partner, a lover or an ex. Dandini, with the collaboration of Maura Misti, a researcher at CNR, has written a short story for each of them, as part of a theatrical piece. These women tell their story from where they are now, regaining life and substance, finally stepping out of a dry and cold list.' http://www.feriteamorte.it/ last accessed, 10 September 2018. *Amore Criminale* is a TV programme broadcast by Rai 3 since 2007 about domestic violence in Italy. Similarly to Dandini's *Ferite a morte*, the aim of *Amore Criminale* – as well as many other Rai 3 TV programmes including, for example, *Chi l'ha visto?* – is to raise awareness about this serious, albeit underestimated, social issue.

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